



Civil War Episodes

Chancellorsville

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

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TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP—ALL THROUGH THE TRAGIC NIGHT

Lincoln Fought and Conquered His Despair

Editor's Note: The famous story of how Abraham Lincoln spent the tragic night after the Union army's rout at Chancellorsville was retold several years ago in the New York Times by William O. Stoddard, Jr., a son of one of Lincoln's private secretaries. The account was written as Stoddard heard it from his father. The following is a condensation of the Times story.

By WILLIAM O. STODDARD

I WAS one of Lincoln's private secretaries and proud of the job. That he had thought enough of me to call me from the editorship of a small-town newspaper in Illinois to a place on his personal staff was gratifying to a man of 24. He placed me at a desk just across the hall from the cabinet room. Here I opened, distributed, and frequently answered his personal mail.

But there came a day, a terrible black cloud of a day. It came rolling across the Potomac and into the White House with the first rumors of disaster from the battlefield of Chancellorsville. John Hay brought it into my room to say to me: "*Stanton says this is the darkest day of the war. It seems as if the bottom has dropped out.*"

My desk was piled high with unopened mail, but the shock of John's message brought with it a numbness of body and spirit, and I sat staring at the closed doors across the hall. How would the President take this, the severest blow of all! Behind lay one sickening defeat after another. What would the President say? What would he do? After Fredericksburg, Governor Curtin, of Pennsylvania, had spoken of Lincoln as "heartbroken



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

He saw beyond defeat to victory

and in a state of nervous excitement bordering on insanity." What would the President do in this worse disaster?

Fighting Joe Hooker had taken his army across the Rappahannock river to a crossroads called Chancellorsville to fight Lee, and Lee, with his "strong right arm," Stonewall Jackson, had outmaneuvered and defeated him.

General Hooker had promised to deliver Richmond to Lincoln. Hooker had 2 to 1 against Lee. Lincoln needed a victory to sustain his fight for the Union; in fact, he had to have a victory—it must be victory this time, at long, long last. What was the man across the hall behind that closed door thinking?

It was an awful day in Washington. We could not hear the thunders of artillery or the rattle of musketry, but the hospitals overflowed with the wounded, and burying parties rattled along the streets. It was a city of despair and death, and the White House was as quiet as though a coffin had its solemn place in one of the rooms.

Long hours mean nothing to me, and it was 9 o'clock when I first saw Seward, Halleck, and Stanton come out of Lincoln's room and walk slowly away.

Not long afterward a dull, heavy, regularly repeated sound came out of Lincoln's room. As I listened I became aware that this was the measured tread of the President's feet, walking.

After Union Rout

My work became mechanical. My mind was with the lonely man across the hall. What was he thinking about? Was he admitting to himself that he had lost his life's battle to hold the Union together? He might be thinking what would happen if England seized upon the great Confederate victory of Chancellorsville as a sufficient reason for recognition. And there was Horace Greeley. No one knew how large was his following.

Ten o'clock. Tramp, tramp, tramp. Would he be held responsible? Surely. He could see the coming cartoons of ridicule, scorn, and insult.

Eleven o'clock. Tramp, tramp, tramp. The rhythmic tread had become such a half-heard monotony that when at 12 o'clock it suddenly ceased it was the silence itself that startled me into listening more intently.

Tramp, tramp, tramp. One o'clock. The man across the hall battled on. What sort of fight was being waged in there? A fight against the debilitating foes of anger, revenge, hatred? A fight for self-mastery? He well knew that a man must first conquer himself before he could conquer the enemy or hold the people to his great purpose. The Union must be preserved.

Tramp, tramp, tramp. Two o'clock. Then 3 o'clock. My work was done, and I tiptoed past the President's door.

It was early morning when I was once more at the White House, letting myself in with my latchkey. On reaching the second floor I saw the President's door wide open and I looked in. There he sat, near the end of the cabinet table, with his breakfast before him. He smiled at me as I entered. "Good morning, Stod," he said.

Just beyond the President's coffee lay a sheet of paper covered with fresh writing in his own hand. Here were the instructions to Hooker to rally the army, take fresh courage, and fight again at the earliest opportunity. Also there were the notations which later became the orders under which General Meade shortly took Hooker's place and marched on to Gettysburg.

I knew that an answer had come to him during that long night of marching for he turned to me as composed as though he had not been up all night in that room face to face with disaster. **ON THAT DARK NIGHT OF VIGIL GOD HAD GIVEN HIM THE VISION TO SEE, BEYOND CHANCELLORSVILLE AND DEFEAT—GETTYSBURG AND VICTORY.**

The Nation Had Other Dark Days

EXTENSION OF REMARKS

OF

HON. GEORGE A. DONDERO

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 14, 1942

Mr. DONDERO. Mr. Speaker, I offer for the RECORD a short article appearing in the New York Times of June 29, 1942. When a nation is at war its people must expect reverses and they must be endured. The hysteria of war causes the pendulum of public opinion to swing to extremes. Impatience and disappointment cloud reason and judgment. Let all be aware of destructive criticism that injury be not done to the united war effort of our people. The aid and support of everyone is needed.

These, too, are dark days. Our way of life, our form of government, and every cherished principle of human right is at stake. In God's good time, with a just cause and a united people, the victory will be won.

The article follows:

HE, TOO, HAD DARK DAYS—THE STORY OF LINCOLN AFTER THE CHANCELLORSVILLE DEFEAT OFFERS INSPIRATION FOR TODAY

(The United States in its long history has known many darker hours than those through which it is living today. In the Civil War, for example, it experienced defeat, humiliation, and survived, drawing from disaster strength with which to meet new tests in new periods of peril. None of that war's lessons in national courage is perhaps greater than the one given by Abraham Lincoln after the Union Army, routed at Chancellorsville in May 1863, fell back to open the way for Confederate invasion of the North. William O. Stoddard, one of President Lincoln's secretaries, wrote years ago of what happened at the White House on the tragic night of Chancellorsville. His son, William O. Stoddard, Jr., has here retold it. "I have written it," he says, "as it was told me by my father, he marching up and down the room with a fighting fire in his eye.")

(By William O. Stoddard)

I was one of Lincoln's private secretaries and proud of the job. That he had thought

enough of me to call me from the editorship of a small-town newspaper in Illinois to a place on his personal staff was gratifying to a man of 24. He placed me at a desk just across the hall from the Cabinet room, so I should be within easy call. Here I opened, distributed, and frequently answered his personal mail. Here, without notice, he would pick me up to accompany him on his various evening calls at the home of McClellan or Seward or on a trip to Ford's Theater.

But there came a day, a terrible black cloud of a day. It came rolling across the Potomac and into the White House with the first rumors of disaster from the battlefield of Chancellorsville. John Hay brought it into my room to say to me: "Stanton says this is the darkest day of the war. It seems as if the bottom had dropped out."

My desk was piled high with unopened mail, but the shock of John's message brought with it a numbness of body and spirit, and I sat staring at the closed doors across the hall. How would the President take this, the severest blow of all! Behind lay one sickening defeat after another: Bull Run, the dreary peninsula campaign, and the bloody sacrifice of Fredericksburg, and now this one more ghastly defeat. What would the President say? What would he do? What could he do? After Fredericksburg, Governor Curtin, of Pennsylvania, had spoken of Lincoln as "heartbroken and in a state of nervous excitement bordering on insanity." What would the President do in this worse disaster?

Fighting Joe Hooker had taken his army across the Rappahannock River to a crossroads called Chancellorsville to fight Lee, and Lee, with his "strong right arm," Stonewall Jackson, had outmaneuvered and defeated him.

General Hooker had promised to deliver Richmond to Lincoln. Hooker had 2 to 1 against Lee. Lincoln needed a victory to sustain his fight for the Union; in fact, he had to have a victory—it must be victory this time, at long, long last. England was hesitating as to whether or not the time had come to recognize the Confederacy. This would mean two weak governments for one strong one, and Lincoln's battle for the Union would be lost; and there were many at home, including Horace Greeley, of the Tribune, who favored mediation. We must have a victory and have it now, and here instead was Chancellorsville. What was the man across the hall behind that closed door thinking?

It was an awful day in Washington. We could not hear the thunders of artillery or the rattle of musketry, but the hospitals overflowed with the wounded, and burying parties rattled along the streets. It was a city of despair and death, and the White House was as quiet as though a coffin had its solemn place in one of the rooms. The very few who called that day seemed to walk on tiptoe, as though in fear of waking the dead. Only those on important business were allowed to pass.

Long hours meant nothing to me, and it was 9 o'clock when I first saw Seward, Halleck, and Stanton come out of Lincoln's room and walk slowly away. I was alone on that floor of the White House, except for the President across the hall behind the now half-open door. It seemed to me the hall and the silent rooms were full of shadows, some of which came in and sat down by my desk to ask me what I thought would become of the Union cause and the country.

Not long afterward a dull, heavy, regularly repeated sound came out of Lincoln's room and found its way to mine. As I listened I became aware that this was the measured tread of the President's feet. He was walking the length of the room, to and fro, from wall to wall on the farther side of the Cabinet table.

My work became mechanical. My mind was with the lonely man across the hall. What was he thinking about? Was he ad-

mitting to himself that he had lost his life's battle to hold the Union together? He might be thinking what would happen if England seized upon the great Confederate victory of Chancellorsville as a sufficient reason for recognition. And there was Horace Greeley. No one knew how large was his following.

Ten o'clock. Tramp, tramp, tramp. Would he be held responsible? Surely. He could see the coming cartoons of ridicule, scorn, and insult. He could hear the endless vituperations already so familiar.

Eleven o'clock. Tramp, tramp, tramp. The rhythmic tread had become such a half-heard monotony that when at 12 o'clock it suddenly ceased it was the silence itself that startled me into listening more intently.

What a silence that was! My mind strained for an analogy that might offer an interpretation, and at length caught the picture for which I sought—another lonely man at his country's darkest hour, kneeling in the snow at Valley Forge.

Tramp, tramp, tramp. One o'clock and much to be done. Eagerly I sought relief in my work, while the man across the hall battled on. He hardly seemed to be pausing at the walls. At times his pace quickened as though under the spur of some enlightening thought. What sort of fight was being waged in there? A fight against the debilitating fogs of anger, revenge, hatred? A fight for self-mastery? He well knew that a man must first conquer himself before he could conquer the enemy or hold the people to his great purpose. The Union must be preserved.

Tramp, tramp, tramp. Two o'clock. Then 3 o'clock. My work was done, and I tipped past the President's door. It would have been a sort of sacrilege to have glanced in. Then silently down the stairs and out into the quiet night. How good the cool air from the river. But still there followed the echo of that sentry tread.

It was early morning when I was once more at the White House, letting myself in with my latchkey. It was a bright, sunlit morning. On reaching the second floor I saw the President's door wide open and I looked in. There he sat, near the end of the Cabinet table, with his breakfast before him. He smiled at me as I entered. "Good morning, Stod," he said.

Just beyond the President's coffee lay a sheet of paper covered with fresh writing in his own hand. Here were the instructions to Hooker to rally the Army, take fresh courage, and fight again at the earliest opportunity. Also there were the notations which later became the orders under which General Meade shortly took Hooker's place and marched on to Gettysburg.

I knew that an answer had come to him during that long night of marching for he turned to me as composed as though he had not been up all night in that room face to face with disaster. On that dark night of vigil God had given him the vision to see, beyond Chancellorsville and defeat—Gettysburg and victory.



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